Imagining Peace

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By
Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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"May the Lord lift up His countenance toward you, and grant you peace." (Numbers 6:26)

When bombs are exploding and missiles are flying, it is difficult to imagine peace. When children are taught to hate and suicide/homicide murderers are called "freedom fighters", it is difficult to imagine peace. When all sides list their grievances and do not listen to the grievances of others, it is difficult to imagine peace.

But if we do not try to imagine peace, peace will not come. So let us imagine, in spite of all the "facts on the ground", that peace must be achieved. What voices can guide us? What words can be a salve to our wounds? How can we put the dream of peace into real terms?

In 1919, Rabbi Benzion Uziel, then a young rabbi, spoke to a conference of rabbis in Jerusalem. He stated: "Israel, the nation of peace, does not want and never will want to be built on the ruins of others....Let all the nations hear our blessing of peace, and let them return to us a hand for true peace, so that they may be blessed with the blessing of peace." In 1939, when Rabbi Uziel became Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, he delivered his inaugural address in Hebrew, and then added words in Arabic. He appealed to the Arab community: "We reach our hands out to you in peace, pure and trustworthy....Make peace with us and we will make peace with you. Together all of us will benefit from the blessing of God on His

land; with quiet and peace, with love and fellowship, with goodwill and pure heart we will find the way of peace."

Rabbi Uziel's words reflected the wishes of the tiny Jewish community in the land of Israel in those times. His words still reflect the wishes of the Jewish community of Israel today. Hawks and doves alike would like nothing better than genuine, secure peace. They would like Israeli society to be free and happy, without the specter of warfare and terrorism, without the constant threat and reality of Arab military, economic and political attacks. They would like to live in harmony with their Arab neighbors-and to trust that their Arab neighbors will want to live in harmony with them.

But Rabbi Uziel's words need to be stated and restated by the leaders of Israel. The idea of reaching a mutually rewarding peace must be put into words, must be repeated, must be believed and taught. Will words create peace? Not immediately. But they will set the foundations of peace. The words will help transform the dream of peace into a framework for peace.

In 1919, at the Paris peace conference following World War I, the Emir Feisal, one of the great Arab leaders of the time, made the following comments about the Jewish desire to return to their ancient homeland in Israel: "We Arabs...look with the deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement....We will wish the Jews a most hearty welcome home....I look forward, and my people with me look forward, to a future in which we will help you and you will help us, so that the countries in which we are mutually interested may once again take their places in the community of civilized peoples of the world."

If more Arab leaders-especially Palestinian leaders-could find the strength to say these words, the dream of peace might be brought closer to reality. Israel wants most what the Arab world has for the most part not given: a sign of acceptance, a sign of welcome, a sign that Jews have a right to live in peace and tranquility in the land of Israel. The people of Israel need to hear what Emir Feisal said: welcome home; we will help you and you will help us. Together we will raise our peoples to great cultural and economic heights.

It is encouraging that a number of Arab countries have been making peace with Israel. All involved will benefit enormously from peaceful relations.

If we are to imagine peace, we must look beyond the hatred, war and violence; we must look to a better day...and we must pray that the Almighty will bless the people of Israel--and all good people everywhere--with genuine peace.

Angel for Shabbat